

Archives Advice No. 3

Microfilming Agency Records

Considerations for Government Officials

Micrographics requires the use of different techniques and adherence to various standards to ensure the longevity of the medium. The agency's microfilm must meet quality standards established by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and the Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM). These standards, when followed, ensure that the agency's investment in staff time and money produces a good product.

When is microfilm the appropriate choice for reformatting agency records?

Reformatting hard copy (paper) records is often an effective method of reducing space requirements, improving access, and protecting originals. Because return on investment (ROI) for microfilming records averages about fifteen years, microfilm is better suited for temporary long-term and permanent records. However, microfilming may be considered for short-term vital records that are needed in the event of a disaster.

The following four considerations should be addressed by the agency before selecting a reformatting technology:

1. What level of access is needed to the records? Microfilm lends itself to one staff member at a time accessing the records. If multiple simultaneous access by more than one staff member is needed, microfilm is not the answer, unless multiple copies and readers are provided.
2. What records classification (retention) do the records fall into? Temporary long-term and permanent records are better suited for a microfilm solution.
3. What are the budgetary resources of the agency for maintaining reformatted records? The maintenance of digital images relies on the agency's continued ability to upgrade software and hardware as needed. Microfilmed records require less maintenance than digital images (which must be migrated regularly to ensure their readability) but should be stored in a temperature and humidity controlled area – a requirement for the camera master. In addition, all reformatting projects should be cost-justified prior to the expenditure of funds.
4. What are the vital records the agency will need in the event of a disaster? The vital records of the agency (those records needed to resume business) should be duplicated at another location for disaster recovery purposes. Microfilm is an ideal medium in which to duplicate records for disaster preparedness and recovery needs.

Justifying a Micrographics Project

Records management procedures frequently offer more simple and economic solutions to information storage and retrieval problems than microfilm. These procedures include:

1. Destruction of records.
2. Retirement of inactive files to an agency storage area.
3. Improved methods of maintaining records, such as better file naming conventions, indexing, purging of duplicate material, or other filing practices.



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4. Establishing controls over the creation of records.

If these procedures do not offer an appropriate solution to an information storage and retrieval problem, reformatting the records may be justified using one of the following categories:

1. **Archival.** Microfilming is often justified as a means of preservation for records designated as permanent by the agency's retention schedule. Preservation by microfilming might be justified if records are deteriorating, fading, becoming brittle, or becoming mutilated through constant use. Also, microfilming might be justified to insure file integrity if records are frequently lost or otherwise not returned to the files.
2. **Security.** Microfilming may be justified to ensure the protection of records that are vital to continued agency operations in the event of an emergency.
3. **System Improvement.** Microfilming may be justified if it can be demonstrated conclusively that substantial benefits will be achieved over the cost incurred by the existing system. Although it is sometimes cost-effective to microfilm active records, it is generally uneconomical to microfilm records that may be stored off-site or destroyed within ten years or less. Microfilming may be justified to effect the reduction in cost or time of work; provide multiple, low-cost copies where multiple access is required; ensure file integrity; or provide a low-cost off-site storage copy of vital records.

How can a public official determine whether a record should be kept in electronic form, on paper, or as microfilm? One way is to think of the record as though it were two records: one record for *access* (for efficient service) and one record for *retention* (for protection of legal rights). In fact, to achieve these two goals a government may need to produce two copies of the record, one for access and one for retention. The chart below will help public officials evaluate record formats.

If you need further assistance, please call the Georgia Archives at (678) 364-3790.

<u>When these conditions apply...</u>	<u>Consider these formats...</u>		
Access copy considerations	Paper	Microfilm	Electronic
Users need rapid access to information.	Good	Poor	Excellent
Many people need access at the same time.	Poor	Good	Excellent
The information must be secure from alteration or theft.	Poor*	Excellent*	Poor*
Record storage space is limited.	Poor	Good	Excellent
Retention copy considerations	Paper	Microfilm	Electronic
The information must be retained for 15 years or less.	Excellent	Good	Good
The information must be retained for 16 years or more.	Excellent	Excellent	Poor
The information is vital to agency operations and must be duplicated for disaster recovery.	Poor	Excellent*	Excellent*
The records are fragile and need to be reproduced.	Poor	Excellent	Excellent

*Agency policies and procedures will have an important influence on this as well.